

*It is the mission of the Natural Resources Commission to provide stewardship of, education about, and advocacy for the Town of Wellesley's parks, conservation, recreation and open space areas so the full value of the Town's natural assets can be passed onto future generations.*

**The Wellesley Natural Resources Commission and Director held its annual retreat on September 23, 2021. The goals and work from the past year were recounted, and goals and work for the upcoming year were determined.**

## **Opening Comments**

- 1) Retreat Goal – vision of 2021-2022 priorities reviewed to allow NRC to focus on priorities

The Commission reviewed and affirmed ten-year goals. (See Summary Table below) Commissioners reviewed notes shared prior to the retreat with summary 2021 accomplishments and gaps, 2022 goals and desired accomplishments.

## **Director's Overview**

### **2. Five-Year Capital Projects and Budgets for the NRC and Morses Pond (FY2022 budget due in October)**

The Director confirmed that the first 16 projects on the list below are either completed or ongoing, and inquired to the Board about desired future projects.

-The board reviewed the projects:

1. Duck Pond Bridge (CPC-Funded): Complete
2. Warren Park Inclusive Play (CPC Funded): Complete
3. Perrin Park Basketball courts (CPC-Funded): Complete except for line painting
4. Morses Pond Water Quality Management – Ongoing
5. Church Park Restoration (CPC-Funded) – Ongoing - Design underway by DPW
6. Fuller Brook Park Invasive Management – Ongoing
7. Aqueduct Bathroom – (CPC-Funded) – Ongoing - Awaiting Drawings, installation
8. Hunnewell Tennis Courts and Diane Warren Field Lighting Retrofit – Ongoing - Promoted to request for FY22
9. HS Track and Field Restrooms, Team Rooms, Snack Shack, other additions/changes: In design. Partially funded, balance will be covered by Private Donations
10. Morses Pond Erosion (CPC/NRC Capital) Funded, partially complete; (includes \$147,000/year as a standing request); Review Morses Pond Capital Request for FY 2022-FY2027
11. Open Space and Recreation Plan – In progress

12. Native Plants/Pollinator Corridors (encompassed in the Operational Budget Landscaping line item, dependent on cost and scope)
13. Large Harvester Replacement: (CPC-Funded) DPW put out to bid 9/2021;
14. Dredging of Small Ponds (see Ken's comprehensive report on dredging small ponds); Estimate of \$100,000 to cover permitting costs, project implementation will be extra)
15. North 40 - no specific request
16. Scenic Squirrel Road – the NRC “owns” the part of the road that is surrounded by conservation lands. NRC to determine with the DPW how the road should be maintained, and which department is responsible for any repair costs;
17. Meadow Project – a potential CPC-eligible project
18. Active Open Space Optimization study: Proposed FY21
19. Playground upgrades in budget for FY 2025; may overlap with DPW upgrades
20. Possible Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program proposal
21. Town Forest Nursery – support \$55,000 for tree planting

### **3. Overview of Operating Budgets for the NRC and Morses Pond**

-The board discussed the budgets and strategies to fund “orphan” projects, (e.g. Scenic Squirrel Road), and the need for sustainable and clear funding sources for maintenance of facilities and amenities on NRC property (e.g. basketball court lighting). Repair and maintenance of some items is in the DPW budget (e.g. portable toilets temporarily at Perrin Park). The collaboration with DPW has made it possible to address issues as they arise but that may not always be possible. It is important to clarify whose responsibility (and budget) should cover items that may be in a grey area. In particular, it is important to ensure that maintenance items are in the DPW budget, or they should be incorporated into the NRC budget.

The aqueduct bathroom may be built by end of year; for budgeting purposes the bathrooms will require maintenance and the DPW has agreed to maintain the building.

Discussion of how to manage contributions from Algonquin to capital fund.

Discussion of the need to conduct a Active Recreation Optimization Study, and who should budget for and lead.. Clarification that this involves NRC, Schools, PFTF, and Recreation. Questions of how to have continuity with master planning process, as priorities change with the times. NRC would collaborate with all the stakeholders. NRC budget will include a line item in the budget and can be reviewed and voted on by the Board. Study may be CPC-funding eligible.

### **4. New Initiatives:**

- 1) **Municipal Vulnerability Program** – NRC to consider new projects and initiatives for the MVP program.
- 2) **NRC and DPW Engineering Storm Water** – State and Federal laws regulate stormwater discharge; consequently, the DPW is currently considering a storm water utility fee for residential homeowners based on average or median

impervious surface/lot coverage. The NRC was very interested to learn more about this approach to address the Town's increasing stormwater management issues and would consider supporting this emerging bylaw.

- 3) **By-law change** to enable the NRC to ticket individuals for unauthorized tree removals. This will simplify the process of fee collection.
- 4) **Meadow project** to model and encourage the conversion of lawn to more habitat-friendly areas. Possibly eligible for CPC funding

## **5. Current Staffing Models and Issues for the NRC**

-The board discussed efforts to ensure proper classification of the current positions, and possible expansion of the Environmental Education position. This position is responsible for communicating about the issues that the town is facing that relate to NRC goals, as well as providing educational opportunities for our residents. There may be a benefit to figuring out the balance of time dedicated to communication to different audiences and on different topics. This could involve reviewing other municipality models and defining how the expanded position clearly promotes the mission, and looking for potential funding from the School Committee for NRC efforts that are focused on schools.

The Director reported that the NRC Secretary has resigned. Staffing ideas for meeting the Board's objectives as well as the Department's needs were discussed.

There was support to ensure that the Director and Wetlands Administrator positions are properly classified in the Town banding. The NRC Chair is working with the HR Department towards this goal.

## **6. Open Space and Recreation Plan – Initial Findings**

-Initial survey results at the time of the meeting were discussed as well as ideas to expand the survey and collect additional responses.

-The 3 most identified goals and objectives for those goals from the survey were discussed.

### **Goal 1: Restore, preserve, and enhance open space for water, air and habitat protection, biodiversity, climate mitigation, enhancement of community character, and enjoyment of the public.**

- Provide and maintain sufficient natural areas so that important plant and wildlife species can be sustained.
- Continue to protect, enhance, and seek to increase open space in Wellesley.
- Maintain and improve the quality and health of the natural infrastructure of Wellesley

**Goal 10: Provide opportunities for safe and enjoyable walking and bicycle access throughout the Town.**

- Expand and enhance the Town-wide trails network that interconnects and traverses open space.
- Maintain the trails network and existing trails through park and woodlands.
- Promote the development of bicycle routes through the Town, as part of the regional transportation system.

**Goal 2: Protect, enhance, and restore Wellesley's sensitive land, water, and wetlands resources, especially those resources that have been degraded or impaired.**

- Protect Morses Pond, Lake Waban, and Longfellow Pond as primary water supply areas and as passive recreational resources.
- Minimize the impact of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemical lawn and landscape treatments on the Town's groundwater and surface water bodies.
- Enforce laws, bylaws, and regulations to protect groundwater, wetlands, and surface water bodies.

## **7. Review of Goals**

**Tree Canopy** – There was a shared concern about changes to the tree canopy and a confirmation that this is an area that benefits from additional study. The 2014-2015 tree audit demonstrated the gap between clearing and canopy renewal. NRC and Planning are interested in studying this issue further. Enforcement remains an issue. There appeared to be agreement that this issue would merit further research.

The board reviewed and reconfirmed last year's goals:

- Promote Environmental Stewardship and Education
- Preserve and Expand the Town's Tree Canopy
- Promote healthy, hearty and pollinator friendly landscapes on Town land and on private property
- Ensure planning, preservation, and maintenance of passive and active open spaces
- Protect the Town's surface, ground and drinking waters
- Address Wellesley's natural gas leaks
- Advocate for Legislation that supports these goals

**8. The Commission Elected Officers and Appointed Liaisons**  
**- Liaisons/Committee members**

Jay McHale: Wetlands Protection Committee; Bea Bezmalinovic: Playing Fields Task Force; Raina McManus: Community Preservation Committee; Laura Robert: Trails Committee.

**After a motion was made and seconded, the Board voted unanimously on the following slate of officers:**

Chair: Raina McManus  
Vice Chair: Laura Robert  
Secretary: Bea Bezmalinovic

10-year goals (Decade goals set by the NRC in 2017/2018)	2021 Accomplishments	Areas for continued Action (gaps in 2021)	2022 Goals	2022 Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect existing shade trees and increase the Town's tree canopy</li> </ul>	<p>Being able to do tree plantings last fall and slightly upping the tree budget in a difficult budget year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts to quantify the tree canopy with aerial surveying (although I think that's not complete)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tree/Canopy Protection – issue of daily discussion</li> <li>• Continued coordination with Planning Board; observation that builders/developers may have adjusted their approach</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue making progress on encouraging more sustainable approaches to the natural environment, which encompasses support for pesticide free care, encouraging natives, tackling invasive species, expanding the public shade tree program (or ensuring that we are maintaining tree canopy, not losing it).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect Trees</li> <li>• Continue efforts to quantify tree canopy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve Management/Stewardship of Town Forest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning updating Open space plan.</li> <li>• the trails sub-committee's work at Centennial</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Trails/Wetlands/NRC communication and coordination, and enhance coordination of Trails events and initiatives</li> <li>• Explore and encourage safe connections between and travel to open spaces through the Mobility and Trails committees. Consider creating a policy for private use of public land during emergencies (ex. COVID-</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to protect drinking water</li> </ul>				

10-year goals (Decade goals set by the NRC in 2017/2018)	2021 Accomplishments	Areas for continued Action (gaps in 2021)	2022 Goals	2022 Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Protect the biodiversity of the town</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pollinator project,</li> <li>● iNaturalist project to document where pollinator plants were located.</li> </ul>		Continue pol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue Grow Green Wellesley Initiatives to protect our water, environment and health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pollinator habitat, organic pest management, healthy yards, planting of native species</li> <li>○ Outreach to institutions like the new Wellesley Office Park, and the Wellesley Community Center</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promote the protection of open space (Active and Passive)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● progress on the aqueduct bathrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gaining an understanding of playing fields needs for all sports and understanding of how to provide more equitable access to playing fields across all sports.</li> <li>● Field improvements with respect to lighting</li> <li>● helpful for the NRC to coordinate with other Town boards (Schools, Recreation) to develop a master plan that optimizes the use of our current recreational space over the next 5-10 years to respond to demand while protecting existing open space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Master plan (with Schools and PFTF) of all active fields in town in order to have 5-year plan for usage improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review and make recommendations on proposed facilities and upgrades on parklands</li> <li>● Seek to create balance in open spaces for Active and Passive Recreation</li> <li>● ○ Explore options to meet field demand</li> </ul>

10-year goals (Decade goals set by the NRC in 2017/2018)	2021 Accomplishments	Areas for continued Action (gaps in 2021)	2022 Goals	2022 Activities
<p>Improve the functioning of the NRC within Town Government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• our contribution on COVID related matters from smooth NRC operations and engaged and retained staff, to collaboration with other departments, and the public - - providing appropriate and safe solutions to problems and challenges, alternative educational programming and experiences, and thoughtful attention to and investment in lands and water bodies under our jurisdiction.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begun implementation of/supporting NRC pieces of the new sustainable mobility plan and CAP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the creation of the Town's Climate Action Plan</li> <li>• Continue MVP town-wide planning</li> <li>• Continue participating in the CRWA Climate Compact</li> <li>• Leverage relationships with other boards, committees, departments and environmental groups to further the NRC Mission, including: (Police, Planning, Select Board, Recreation, Schools, Health, DPW, Wellesley Land Trust, Native Plant Trust, Gas Leaks Allies )</li> <li>• NRC Director will evaluate the current office-staffing model and make any recommendations.</li> </ul>

10-year goals (Decade goals set by the NRC in 2017/2018)	2021 Accomplishments	Areas for continued Action (gaps in 2021)	2022 Goals	2022 Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease the impact of exterior lighting on the natural environment in the town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NRC has made progress on improving the lighting the Hunnewell field and tennis courts for both residents and the natural environment around the fields.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding Secured for Replacement of Existing Lights at Warren Field and Tennis Courts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend and review exterior lighting on new buildings on parkland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Work with lighting consultant to determine how to improve existing lighting at playing fields and courts, and provide/recommend stadium lighting options</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect air quality</li> </ul>	Plant Trees		Plant More Trees	Advertise More Trees!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce noise pollution</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint (with schools) sound policy for open fields in town</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce litter and plastic waste</li> </ul>	Continued engagement with WHS Project Plastic group			Update Plastic Bag bylaw Support State waste-reduction legislation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice Climate Resilience and Preparedness</li> </ul>	Begin Climate Action Plan participation		Review and consider supporting the DPW's proposed stormwater fee. Propose MVP project. Climate Action Planning	If appropriate, support Stormwater Fee. New MVP Project Participate in CAP planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage Community Engagement</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comprehensive plan for outreach and communication that goes beyond our traditional partners to support education and outreach on sustainable landscapes to the business community, the schools and sports communities with guidance on supporting more sustainable</li> </ul>	

10-year goals (Decade goals set by the NRC in 2017/2018)	2021 Accomplishments	Areas for continued Action (gaps in 2021)	2022 Goals	2022 Activities
			landscapes. Emphasize the long-term cost savings of sustainable landscapes, and demonstrate inexpensive, easy and attractive methods.	